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SUBJECT: TIRANA RESPONSE FOR EUR ENGAGEMENT ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

REF: STATE 124579

¶1. The following is in response to reftel request and answers are keyed to reftel format.

-- Provide details on current women's issues programs which highlight Post's work with civil society, NGOs, local governments, international or regional organizations, and other relevant interlocutors.

Embassy efforts have been systematic in supporting women's issues in Albania by closely following political, social, economic, and legislative developments regarding women's issues. Democracy Commission funded projects, AID projects, IIP Speaker programs, public appearances by the Ambassador, DCM, and Embassy staff, thematic trips and events, and IVLP programs all play a part in supporting women's issues in Albania.

During the past two years, the Democracy Commission Program has supported the initiatives of 13 women's organizations:

- Through six Democracy Commission grants the Embassy helped raise awareness on domestic violence. During these grants, 1,012 women and girls from the rural areas of Diber, Shkoder and Tirana, and 244 high school students of Berat district, were trained on how to face and fight domestic violence.
- One grant helped train 500 women in three communes of Elbasan district with vocational skills (agriculture), resisting domestic violence, and anti-trafficking.
- Four projects focused on activities related to women's participation in elections and decision-making. 100 members of the Women's Forums of the political parties participated in shaping a cross-party approach to gender equality issues, based on the exchange of the best practices from various political forces; 376 women activists in seven cities of Albania contributed to increasing the number of elected women in local government units in the last elections.
- Through an IIP Speaker program in March 2009, U.S. speaker Ann Stone met with women's NGOs, political party women forum representatives, and media about women's empowerment and increased representation in all aspects of life in Albania. Stone spoke with about 30 political party women representatives in preparation for the upcoming June parliamentary elections in the country and gave workshops on campaign planning, public speaking, and message development.
- The IVLP has continued its tradition of sending women leaders from different fields in programs such as "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Global Women's Issues" and "Women and Entrepreneurship."
- The Ambassador, DCM, and Embassy staff speak on a regular basis at events which mark the celebration of thematic days, achievements, and important issues related to women's rights. For example, Ambassador hosted an event during Women's History month in which he recognized a local Albanian woman for her role in fighting human trafficking. The DCM spoke recently at a forum on women in parliament and underscored the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues as well as the work of embassy colleagues who are females.
- USAID has started a new initiative which aims to address the sustainability of anti-trafficking efforts in Albania and protect victims of trafficking and persons vulnerable to exploitation. USAID will provide support to existing TIP victim shelters and

continue civil society's advocacy work to help the GOA become compliant with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Activities will focus on: building capacity of individual NGO shelters to achieve financial sustainability to assist trafficked women with reintegration; building capacity of shelters to advocate for policy changes; and enhancing cooperation between civil society and the GOA. As a result of these interventions, USAID assistance will help to ensure sustainability of social services provided by the shelters and full reintegration of exploited women and create successful linkages among NGOs that provide services (such as shelters) and appropriate local government. Assistance will also strengthen the shelters' ability to advocate on trafficking in persons and inform policy changes.

- USAID's Women in Development Office made funds available for a project to improve the capability of women-run NGOs, associations, and businesses to advocate for enhancing women's participation in politics at the local and national levels. Experts from civil society (local governance members, anti-trafficking council members, higher education rectors, political think tank experts, current politicians, lawyers, judges, business leaders, Chamber of Commerce leaders, etc.) met in multiple national forums to discuss 'where we stand' and how to improve gender equality through laws, regulations, funding, emphasis, etc. Trainings consisted of multiple roundtables and meetings followed by selected trainings in-country to gain greater exposure to other methods.

- While women in Albanian society are still subject to discrimination, disabled women face even greater challenges as they represent one of the most marginalized groups of society. Unfortunately, little or almost nothing is said about the reality of women with disabilities in Albania. To combat this, USAID funded a study entitled "Women with Disabilities in Albania- Included or Neglected?" which was published in May 2009. The study represents an evaluation of the rights of women with disabilities in Albania and focuses on achieving gender equality and disability rights. In addition, the study aims to make an assessment of the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in the strategies, programs and activities of the organizations focused on gender equality and disability. Thirty eight nonprofit organizations (NPOs) whose work focuses on women and gender equality expressed their willingness to participate in the study, along with 28 NPOs whose work focuses on disabled persons as well as six international organizations.

-- Provide a list of best practices on these issues, identified through both current and past programs.

- The USAID funded "Women with disabilities in Albania- Included or Neglected?" study, published in May 2009, made recommendations to combat discrimination against women with disabilities which have been drawn from by the GOA and other organizations in their efforts to stem discrimination against women with disabilities.

- Post's numerous roundtables on women's issues have increased the dialogue on women's issues and brought more much needed attention to the role of women in society.

-- Provide illustrative examples of success stories, from current and past initiatives that have focused on women's issues.

- Two Public Affairs projects focused on activities related to women's political empowerment in elections helped lead to the 30 percent quota in the new electoral law by promoting awareness and dialogue. (Note: As part of the new electoral code passed in 2008, female candidates are required to make up 30 per cent of the candidates on a party's ballot. However in practice, many women's names are placed very low on ballots ensuring that they would not be elected under Albania's regional proportional parliamentary system in which votes are allocated to candidates in order of their appearance on the ballot. Nevertheless, in the June 28 elections the number of women in the parliament increased from 9 to 23, making women 15 per cent of the MPs, including the Speaker. End note.)

- With USAID's Women in Development funds, Post sponsored six roundtables which were held around the country and engaged nearly 300 female and male leaders in identifying and discussing the main issues that limited the role of women in the family and society. High priority issues included: mentality/culture/ tradition of the role of women; high unemployment among women and economic dependency, low participation of women in politics/decision making, women's health issues and lack of awareness, treatment and policies,

obstacles to education, and domestic violence.

- In addition to the roundtables, six 15 minute documentaries were produced and broadcast on national TV. All had as a subtext the issue of the traditional role of women. The central figure of each was a woman who had overcome obstacles to become a successful business woman, to find employment, to become a decision-maker (with a subtext regarding women's health), to excel in the field of education, to assist victims of domestic violence, and to assist people with disabilities. The message in each of them encourages women/girls to play a fuller role in society and encourages decision-makers to give that space to women.

- One woman who has worked tirelessly on anti-trafficking initiatives was nominated by Post as a TIP Hero for the 2009 TIP report. This woman traveled to Washington to participate in the rollout ceremony for the 2009 TIP Report and was featured in the report. Local media outlets highlighted her award.

-- Identify opportunities where there is potential for increasing cooperation between the United States and local governments and/or civil society groups on these issues.

Domestic violence and human trafficking, lack of economic empowerment, and increasing the level of women's participation in politics and decision-making remain pressing issues. Approaches to address these needs could include:

- Promoting women's involvement in political campaigns.
- Creating cross-cutting formal coalitions of various women's groups in civil society, political parties, trade unions, academia and business, and student networks.
- Engaging the younger generation, and encouraging it to move forward with this issue.
- Working with NGOs and government for the full implementation of the Domestic Violence Law, which was passed in 2008, but its implementation is considered lacking.
- Continue IVLP and IIP programs that focus on women's issues.
- Identify areas where additional U.S. action and/or cooperation on women's issues could be useful.
  
- Work with NGOs and government to battle cultural mores that can "track" women from an early age. For example, discrimination in the home towards young girls can often have a deleterious effect on their development.

JONES